

Greed and profit at heart of racism, lynching expert says

October 7, 2022

WACO—Systemic racism has more to do with greed and profit than with race-based hatred, a Baylor University authority on lynching told a Christian community development conference.

“Racism is not fundamentally about identity but about political economy,” said Malcolm Foley, director of Black church studies at Baylor’s Truett Theological Seminary.

Foley, special adviser to the university president for equity and campus engagement, addressed the No Need Among You Conference at First Baptist Church in Waco.

“Christian anti-racism risks a descent into sentimentalism” when it focuses on changing hearts and attitudes toward individuals without looking at the economic and political systems that lie behind racism, Foley asserted.

The Christian confession of faith—Jesus is Lord—is “profoundly political” because it means mammon—“the god of profit”—is not Lord, he said.

For centuries, racism has provided the justification and rationale for economically exploitative practices, from chattel slavery to the extermination of indigenous people, Foley insisted.

“Racism is not historically about hate. It’s historically about greed,” he said.

‘Demonic feedback loop’

Foley described a “demonic feedback loop” of exploitation, enforcement through violence and justification. The justification—the idea of white supremacy and the inherent inferiority of people of color—arose to provide a rationale for exploitation of non-whites, he explained.

Foley, whose doctoral dissertation focused on African American Protestant responses to lynching in the late 19th century and early 20th century, said the proper question to ask when encountering racism is, “Who benefits?”

Between 1883 and 1941, 3,000 Black men were lynched in the United States, he said. Lynching lost its social acceptance not when America became more enlightened and benevolent but when lynching became “bad for business,” Foley observed.

Rather than focusing solely on individual racist attitudes and actions, he encouraged Christians to consider systems involving policies, practices and processes, as well as people.

Theologically, he referred to the Apostle Paul’s writing in Ephesians 6 about wrestling “not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

“We must be a repenting and a resisting people” who not only repent of complicity with sinful value systems, but also resist economic exploitation, Foley said.

Rather than simply accepting unfettered capitalism in an unquestioning fashion, he encouraged Christians to adopt a “counter-economy that sees need and exploitation as evil.”

Even so, he warned, some will feel threatened by that message. He pointed

to the example of Martin Luther King, whose public approval ratings plummeted when he began to focus not just on racial justice, but also on economic justice.

However, Christ's followers are called to "walk in the way of the cross" and stand for all manner of justice, he insisted,

"Seek to build communities with no need," he urged. "Make your churches agents of the just redistribution of resources."

Analysis: Some Christian Democrats abandoning the Social Gospel

October 7, 2022

(RNS)—About a decade ago, the conservative commentator and radio show host Glenn Beck told listeners to "look for the words 'social justice' or 'economic justice' on your church website. If you find it, run as fast as you can."

In essence, Beck was telling his followers to reject a strain of Christian theology that dates back at least 100 years in the United States: the Social Gospel.

Popularized by Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist pastor, in the early 20th century, this theology focuses on issues such as poverty, exploitation, disease and hunger as the primary action items for the church.

Instead of focusing on the individual problem of sin, Rauschenbusch and other advocates of the Social Gospel believed Christians should focus on reforming institutions in the United States to make the country more equitable and fairer for all people.

Do American Christians still embrace the core principles of that doctrine? Or do they agree with Beck?

Acceptance of Social Gospel

Certain aspects of the Social Gospel still enjoy widespread approval. For instance, about 80 percent of Christians believe “God instructs us to protect the poor,” and only 15 percent believe “addressing social issues distracts people from achieving salvation.”

Other facets of the Social Gospel provoke more disagreement. While 61 percent of nonwhite evangelicals agree “social justice is at the heart of the Gospel,” that sentiment is only shared by 36 percent of white evangelicals. About 3 in 5 white evangelicals—twice the rate of other Christian groups—agree with the statement “God is more concerned about individual morality than social inequalities.”

Given that white evangelicals are outliers on a number of questions related to the Social Gospel, and white evangelicals’ tendency to vote for Republicans, it seems probable their divergence from nonevangelicals’ views on social justice is more about political partisanship than about theological tradition. The data confirms that suspicion.

For instance, a Christian who is Republican is twice as likely as a Christian Democrat to believe “building the kingdom of God on earth is only about bringing people to Christ, not changing social structures.”

Two thirds of Democrats who are Christians believe “social justice is at the

heart of the Gospel,” while just 36 percent of independents and 35 percent of Republicans of the faith share that belief.

Social Gospel at church

Given that Democrats are more likely to embrace tenets of the Social Gospel, it would be fair to believe they are hearing these beliefs amplified in their churches, while Republicans are hearing more discussion of personal salvation and individual responsibility.

To test that theory, I put together a data model to determine how religion interacts with political partisanship to shape people’s beliefs about the Social Gospel. This model only included respondents who identified with a religious tradition. The religiously unaffiliated “nones” were excluded. I controlled for age, income, education, gender, race and other basic demographic factors.

Clearly, Republican Christians, regardless of church attendance, are more likely to believe individual morality is more important than societal inequalities. Church attendance only accelerates this belief, with more than half of Republicans who are weekly attenders agreeing on personal morality, compared with less than 40 percent of those who never attend.

Not much of a surprise. But for Democrats, the data gets more interesting. The more they attend church, the more likely they are to embrace a message of individual responsibility as opposed to societal sin.

If those on the left side of the political spectrum are attending churches that preach a strong version of the Social Gospel, those messages are not finding their way into the hearts and minds of the average liberal churchgoer. In fact, the data says just the opposite: The more Democrats go to church, the more they hold views on individual responsibility in common with Republicans.

That may come as a surprise to many progressive Christian communities and organizations that focus squarely on Social Gospel concerns like the Poor People's Campaign, but there is no evidence to be found here that religious Democrats are more likely to focus on the problems preachers like Rauschenbusch focused on during the Progressive Era.

Instead, American Christianity is being seen more and more as a vertical relationship with God as opposed to a horizontal relationship with those in the community.

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Ahead of the Trend is a collaborative effort between Religion News Service and the Association of Religion Data Archives made possible through the support of the John Templeton Foundation.

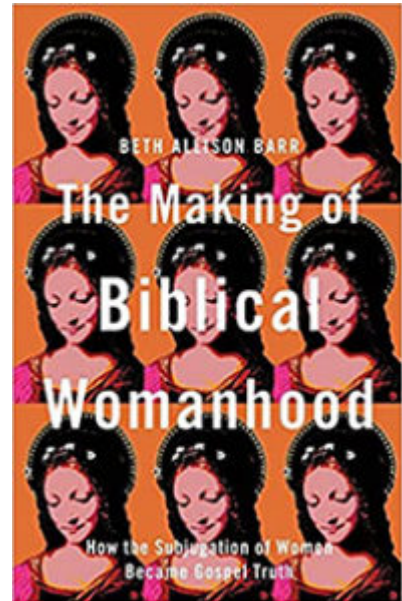
Barr: God sees women even when Christian patriarchy does not

October 7, 2022

The Bible tells the stories of women whom God used and who exercised spiritual leadership, but they are all-but-invisible when Scripture is viewed

through patriarchal lenses, best-selling author Beth Allison Barr told a Christian community development gathering.

Barr, professor of history at Baylor University and author of [*The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*](#), spoke to the No Need Among You Conference at First Baptist Church in Waco.



Views about what the Bible teaches regarding women influence how Christians read familiar narratives such as the story of Hagar—the mother of Ishmael who had been enslaved by Abram and Sarai—recorded in Genesis 16.

Drastically different ways of reading the same Scripture passage illustrate “the impact of Christian patriarchy on not only women in our churches, but also how it trickles out to women in our communities,” Barr said.

Two contrasting approaches

She contrasted two approaches to interpreting the text based on the work of Wil Gafney and John Piper.

Gafney, professor of Hebrew Bible at Texas Christian University’s Brite Divinity School, reads Genesis 16 from the perspective of a Black woman theologian. Piper, an influential Reformed pastor-theologian and founder of

the popular Desiring God online resource, views it from a complementarian viewpoint that promote the subordination of women.

Gafney “describes Hagar as a powerless enslaved child—raped, abused, afraid and alone,” Barr noted. “This shocking sequence of events is made even more shocking by the identity of the perpetrators—the man and woman chosen by God to become the parents of his chosen people.”

At the same time, Gafney also notes Sarai herself was a survivor of sexual violence and domestic abuse who was “pimped out” to Pharaoh in Egypt by her husband Abram “because he was afraid for his life.”

At the darkest point in the story of Hagar, Gafney notes, everything changes “because God sees her—an abused, friendless, enslaved child.”

“God sees her, and God acts, making her a promise that she will bear a son, and her descendants—just like the children of Abraham—will be too numerous to count,” Barr said.

In contrast, Piper focuses almost exclusively on the sin of Sarai, the impatience of Abram and the need to wait on God rather than follow human plans, she observed.

“Most of the resources—a combination of sermons, articles and blogs—don’t actually focus on Hagar,” she said.

In one resource, Piper uses “Sarai as an example of what happens when husbands’ and wives’ roles are reversed and the husband listens to the wife,” Barr said. “So that’s how he tells the story of Hagar. It’s because of the sin of Sarai in not submitting to her husband.”

While Gafney sees Hagar as a traumatized victim of abuse caught in a situation not of her own making, Piper barely sees Hagar, except as representative of what happens when people reject God’s plan, Barr

observed.

‘Not seeing women’

“As a historian, one of the things I know is that a hallmark of patriarchy is centering men and not seeing women,” she said.

When men control the narrative, women often are minimized or ignored altogether, she noted.

“Not seeing women hurts women. It also hurts the church,” Barr said.

Patriarchal presuppositions blind readers to scriptural examples of women exercising leadership in churches, she noted. For instance, the Apostle Paul clearly did not intend to issue a blanket prohibition against women leading in churches, because he commended women like Phoebe, Junia and Priscilla.

“This is not revisionist history. No one is adding anything to the text. We’re just showing you what you haven’t seen because you have been looking through the lens of white masculinity,” Barr said.

One tragically high cost of not seeing women in Scripture and not allowing women’s voices to be heard is that women in churches are ignored when they report abuse, she said.

When men control the power structures and women are taught to submit to their authority without question, it allows abuse to continue, she asserted.

“God sees women,” Barr said. “Isn’t it about time the white evangelical world does, too?”

TBM disaster relief meets needs in Florida after Hurricane Ian

October 7, 2022

NAPLES, Fla.—Hurricane Ian is gone, and its floodwaters have receded. But devastating evidence of its presence remains throughout Naples, Fla., where Texas Baptist Men disaster relief volunteers are serving.



TBM disaster relief volunteers work in Naples, Fla., to prepare meals after Hurricane Ian. (TBM Photo)

Random boats float in backyard swimming pools. Kitchen islands have floated away. Walls and flooring in many places remain soaked.

Rain and a 9-foot storm surge flooded entire neighborhoods in Naples and

temporarily knocked out power to many in the area.

In all, the strongest storm to hit Western Florida in history has killed at least 105 people in the United States, in addition to lives claimed in Cuba.

TBM volunteers are making sure Naples survivors have the food they need to push forward and a path forward for recovery, even if the Texans have to clear it themselves.



The day begins no later than 5 a.m. for TBM disaster relief volunteers serving in Naples, Fla. (TBM Photo)

Working alongside Louisiana Baptists, TBM volunteers begin work at 5 a.m. each day, cooking 5,000 to 6,000 meals that are distributed across the area.

Each meal gives people strength to rebuild and “gives them hope that someone out there cares—and that ‘someone’ is Jesus,” said veteran TBM volunteer Joe Crutchfield.



Veteran TBM disaster relief volunteer Joe Crutchfield works in the field kitchen in Naples, Fla. (TBM Photo)

In the affected communities, a TBM flood recovery team from Southeast Texas is removing wet sheetrock, flooring, furniture and appliances. Team members then disinfect each home and let it dry out so it can be rebuilt. In one day, the team accomplishes what would take homeowners weeks or months to do.

Two more TBM flood recovery teams are headed to Naples to multiply TBM's impact after the storm.

"These are extremely difficult days in Naples," said TBM Executive Director/CEO Mickey Lenamon. "People are coming to grips with significant damage. The situation is overwhelming.

"In the midst of it all, TBM volunteers are living out their faith and meeting needs. Please continue to pray for Florida, as well as those who are serving."

To support TBM disaster relief ministries financially, send a check designated for disaster relief to Texas Baptist Men, 5351 Catron Dr., Dallas, TX 75227 or [click here](#) to give online.

Sociologist says white Christians are 'stuck' regarding race

October 7, 2022

Herschel Walker attends closed-door prayer event

October 7, 2022

Georgia Republican candidate for U.S. Senate Herschel Walker attended a closed-door prayer event at a prominent evangelical church in Atlanta on Oct. 4, huddling with religious supporters a day after he denied allegations he paid for an abortion in 2009.

On the Move: Crosby, Harris, Porter, Prudhome and Roe

October 7, 2022

Pastor and staff changes for churches noted for churches in Gatesville, Tilden, Dayton, Nederland and McKinney.

Around the State: Student Athlete Mental Health Endowment at Baylor

October 7, 2022

Baylor University announced a gift from Jarred and Kay Nan Sloan of Houston supporting Baylor Athletics and resourcing Athletics Mental Health Services, which ensures access for Baylor's student-athletes to mental health services.

Christians murdered, thousands

displaced in Nigeria

October 7, 2022

Dozens of Christians were murdered and 6,000 displaced in terrorist attacks in Nigeria's middle belt in September.

Corpus Christi pastor plans to pray in death chamber

October 7, 2022

The State of Texas is scheduled to execute John Henry Ramirez on Oct. 5, and his pastor plans to be in the death chamber to lay a hand on him and pray for him.

TBM volunteers head to Florida to help hurricane survivors

October 7, 2022

The first wave of Texas Baptist Men volunteers are headed to Florida to meet needs caused by Hurricane Ian.

Partnership brings groceries to South Dallas food desert

October 7, 2022

By working collaboratively, two Dallas-area nonprofit organizations with Texas Baptist connections will bring free groceries and other services to a South Dallas food desert.